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**METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CAPTURING MEMORIES OF
DECEASED INDIVIDUALS**

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR CAPTURING MEMORIES OF
DECEASED INDIVIDUALS
FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to the compilation and managing of
5 memories of deceased individuals. In particular to a method and system that allows the compilation of images, text or other information with respect to a particular individual from a variety of unrelated sources and also allows controlled access by various individuals.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 Today when an individual dies, a family member or close friend often writes an obituary with regard to that individual. However, these are typically written from a single point of view and are limited to the point of view of the writer. Also, information for these obituaries is generally taken at a time when the individuals providing the information are under an emotional stress. Thus,
15 these obituaries may not accurately portray or provide a complete understanding of the individual. Finally, these obituaries are generally limited to distribution in local newspapers whereas the individual may have known or been known by many people throughout the country and/or world.

20 In the case of people who are well known such as celebrities, obituaries are kept on file and can be accessed, reported and/or printed by the media in the event the person passes. This of course is not the case for the majority of people.

25 Thus there is a need to provide a way for gathering and distributing information with regard to a deceased individual which takes into account points of view from a variety of different individuals, and therefore provides a more complete understanding of the deceased, that can be viewed and distributed in a wide manner.

30 The present invention seeks to solve these problems by utilizing a communication network, such as the Internet, for allowing people to submit and access an obituary library whereby text messages, images, sound and other data may be submitted and/or accessed by various individuals.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for capturing and distributing memories of a deceased individual, comprising the steps of:

- 5 providing an electronic storage memory database that can be accessed over a communication network, the electronics storage memory database having a unique address for storing data with respect to the deceased individual;
 the database having means for allowing selective entry of information into the database with respect to the selected individual.
- 10 In accordance with another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for capturing and distributing memories of a deceased individual comprising the steps of:
 providing an electronic storage database for an individual that can be accessed over a communication network, the database having a unique address;
- 15 providing means for accessing the database over the communication network;
 the database having means for allowing entry of data into the database with respect to the individual;
 providing pre-authorization for selected individual for accessing
- 20 the database.
- In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for capturing and distributing memories of a deceased individual comprising the steps of:
 providing an electronic storage database for an individual that can be accessed over a communication network, the database having a unique address;
- 25 providing means for accessing the database over the communication network;
 the database having means for allowing entry of data into the database with respect to the individual;
- 30 providing a gatekeeper for having editorial control over entry of the data.

In accordance with still another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for capturing and distributing memories of a deceased individual comprising the steps of:

- 5 providing an electronic storage database for an individual that can be accessed over a communication network, the database having a unique address;
- providing means for accessing the database over the communication network;
- the database having means for allowing entry of data into the database with respect to the individual;
- 10 providing pre-approval of the information prior to being entered into the database.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for capturing and distributing memories of a deceased individual, comprising the steps of:

- 15 providing an electronic storage memory database that can be accessed over a communication network, the electronics storage memory database having a unique address for the deceased individual;
- providing means for automatically accessing the database with respect to the individual over the communication network;
- 20 database having means for allowing entry of information into the database with respect to the selected individual.

In accordance with still another aspect of the present invention there is provided a system for capturing and distributing memories of a deceased individual, comprising:

- 25 an electronic storage memory database that can be accessed over a communication network, the electronics storage memory database having a unique address for storing data with respect to the deceased individual, the database having means for allowing selective entry of information into the database with respect to the selected individual.
- 30 In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention there is provided a software product such that when loaded onto a computer it would cause the computer to do the following steps:

providing pre-authorization for selected individual for accessing the database;

providing a gatekeeper for having editorial control over entry of the data;

5 providing pre-approval of the information prior to being entered into the database.

These and other aspects, objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be more clearly understood and appreciated from a review of the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments and appended 10 claims, and by reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention presented below, reference is made to the accompanying drawings in which:

15 Fig. 1 illustrates a system made in accordance to the present invention for gathering and distributing of information with regard to a deceased individual;

Fig. 2a illustrates a general access living virtual obituary web page/site made in accordance to the present invention;

20 Fig. 2b illustrates a private access living virtual obituary web page/site made in accordance to the present invention;

Fig. 3 illustrates an access card for accessing information with 25 regard to a deceased individual distributed from a site as described in Fig 1;

Fig. 4 illustrates a schematic diagram of a Kiosk used for accessing the virtual reality obituary web page/site in accordance to the present invention;

Fig. 5 describes a flow chart of one method of operation of the present invention; and

30 Fig. 6 describes a flow chart showing another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring to Fig. 1, there is illustrated a system 10 made in accordance to the present invention for gathering and distributing of information with regard to a deceased individual. In the embodiment illustrated, system 10 includes a communication network 12 that is freely accessible by individuals. In the particular embodiment illustrated the communication network 12 is the Internet. However, it can be any other appropriate communication network that may be utilized. System 10 includes a funeral home 14 or other similar type business establishment having an electronic database that can be accessed by the Internet service provider 16 for allowing communication over the Internet. In the embodiment illustrated the electronic database comprises a computer/server 18. The computer/server 18 includes a data entry system 20, for allowing data entry regarding the deceased individual to be entered either by the funeral home or by any guest, employee or other individual at the funeral home. Typically the data entry mechanism is a keyboard, microphone, digital camera, smart card, computer mouse or other computer data entry device. The computer 18 contains software which enables the users to create and maintain a living virtual obituary web, communicate with the Internet, accept and store data about the deceased, and provide a system for data viewing, adding information, and for providing and maintaining various levels of access to the obituary web page/site 25. The software can reside not only on the hosting server but also on the individual user's personal computer 44, 45 at their home or office and on a Kiosk 60.

Now referring to Figs. 2a and 2b, the living virtual obituary web page/site is illustrated. The virtual living obituary web page/site 25 is established on behalf of a deceased individual and is hosted on a server 26. This can be established and maintained at the funeral home 14 or may be hosted at a hosting obituary service 21 which is in communication with the Internet 12. The advantage of having a funeral home or hosting service is they can provide the service for a multitude of individuals, thus potentially lowering the cost for each web page established.

The web page/site 25 will have its' own URL 24 that can be accessed via the Internet. The individual who sets up that web page/site 25

(hereinafter referred to as the owner or controller) can be provided with editorial controls for determining the type and manner of allowing information to be entered onto the web page/site 25. The controller can set up a filter for reviewing submitted data for placement on the web page/site 25. For example, the controller

5 can monitor the type of information that is placed thereon and set up appropriate access for third parties. The controller or someone on his/her behalf enters background information about the deceased. For example, the data entry system 20 at the funeral home 14 can be used for establishing and entering initial information regarding the deceased individual. The initial information can

10 include, but is not limited to, the name and address of the deceased 34, names of the surviving family members 35 and previously deceased family members 36 such as brothers, sisters, wives, husbands, children, grand children and great grand children. The initial information can also include a template 37 setting forth the manner and structure of the web page/site 25. Additional information such as a

15 list of authorized individuals 38 to input information into the web page/site 25 and the type of information/data 39 that may be entered on to the web page/site 25. A system similar to the system used in IBM's Lotus Notes software for providing access to a person's calendar by others for viewing, adding meetings, and managing can be set up for accessing the obituary website/ page 25. For example,

20 multimedia information 48 such as text, images, and sound that are to be associated with the deceased individual can be entered. In a further embodiment the multimedia information 48 can be used by the deceased to leave a message to people for reading after the individual's death. This can be done either in anticipation of death or not.

25 The images can be in the form of still images or streaming digital images. As previously discussed, the controller can provide any desired editorial controls. For example, access to the web page/site 25 can be unrestricted or restricted by passwords that are passed out to selected individuals. In addition, certain sections in the web page/site 25 can be set up having different restricted

30 access. For example, there can be a section for general access 49 and a second section such as a private section 51. The general access can be limited to friends, neighbors, and co-workers while the second section may be exclusively for family

members and closest friends. It is of course understood that any desired number of sections can be established, each with its own set of authorizing rules for viewing and/or submission data/information. Since different individuals have different points of views and may have many interesting facts/information about

5 the deceased individual that many others may not be aware of, the web page/site 25 provides a mechanism whereby people can share different experiences with the deceased individual. This allows people viewing the web page/site 25 a greater understanding of the individual that has passed. For example, people at work may know certain things that the individual has done that the family would like to

10 know about. However, the deceased individual may have never told the family about these things. The obituary web page/site 25 can also provide related information, for example, full name and addresses of relative's or other individual's etc.

Traditionally funeral homes have been responsible for providing

15 local newspapers with information about the deceased. With the additional information provided by the deceased's family and friend, the funeral home now has the opportunity to notify of out of town newspapers such as the newspaper of the town where the deceased grew up or worked etc. This may be done via a connection to the web page/site 25, or by any other means.

20 Similarly, the funeral home can notify alumni organizations, service groups and other organizations of which the deceased might have been a member.

The web page/site 25 can also be set up so that text and/or images are placed together or in different locations. The web page/site 25 can include a

25 specific categories 52 which may in turn be further divided into categories, for example sections directed to particular events and times in the life of the deceased individual. It is to be understood that the web page/site 25 can be segmented in any desired manner and structure so as to correspond to the life experiences of the deceased individual.

30 Another provision of the invention is that the web page/site 25 can also include instructions in the form of a prompt 55 and a place to enter a credit

card number for making donations to certain charitable organizations, in lieu of flowers.

As previously discussed, the site will have a URL address 24 that can be accessed over the Internet by a variety of individuals. One manner in 5 which information can be accessed or distributed from this site would be through the use of an access card 22 as illustrated in Fig. 3. The access card can include a variety of information but would include at least the URL address 24 of the site. In addition, a bar code or magnetic stripe 29 can be provided for devices that can read this information and automatically go to the site. Additional information 10 such as the name of the deceased 27, the date of birth and the date on which the deceased and passed away 28 can be shown on the card.

In the particular embodiment illustrated, an image 30 of the deceased individual is displayed on card 22 as selected by the person setting up the web page/site 25. Other information such as information about the sponsor 32 15 can also be provided. For example, this may include information about the sponsoring business establishment that initiated the web page/site , such as the funeral home 14 who handled the funeral arrangements with respect to the deceased, as this may be a way to defray the costs of operating the web page/site . However, it is to be understood the sponsoring organization may be any 20 organization that desires to sponsor the site and/or provide some service related thereto. The cards 22 can be passed out to individuals who visit the funeral home 14 where the deceased is presented (for example at a wake or funeral). Alternatively, the cards 22 can be sent out directly by the controller, or someone 25 on his/her behalf. In the particular embodiment illustrated, the bar code and/or magnetic stripe 26 is illustrated as being on the front side 34. However, it is to be understood that this can be placed on the backside (not shown). Also, any other appropriate information can be placed on either side of the access card 22.

Referring back to Fig. 1, there is illustrated how individuals are given access to the web site. For example, in the embodiment illustrated, 30 individuals at remote sites such as their homes 40 or offices 42 access the web page/site 25 through appropriate Internet service providers 41, 43, respectively. As illustrated, the individuals at home use a personal computer 44 or other type of

device to access the Internet 12 and to input data/information to be added to the web page/site 25. The personal computers 44 and 45 are hooked up to data entry devices 46 and 47 respectively. These devices 46 and 47 may include, but are not limited to keyboards, scanners, microphone and/or cameras for enabling images or 5 any other desired data to be uploaded to the web page/site 25. It is to be understood the present invention is not limited to the data/information discussed herein, and that any data/information uploaded and/or displayed at and/or from any location for the purposes described herein is covered by this invention.

In the embodiment previously discussed, people are advised of 10 their ability to access the web site/page 25 through the distribution of an access card 22, Figure 3. It is of course understood that this information can be disseminated by other means either at the funeral home or through a newspaper or by any other means. In an alternate embodiment, which is especially desirable in situations where access is to be restricted to only close friends and relatives of the 15 deceased, a sign up book (not shown) is provided at the funeral home 14 where individuals can place their names and/or e-mail addresses. An e-mail, or other notification can be sent to these individuals who may either desire to view the information already on the web page/site 25 or to submit new information by sending an e-mail, or any other notification to the web site. In this way, an e-mail 20 is sent which allows the client at home to automatically have access to the web site.

Depending on the type of security system set up by the owner/controller of the site, new information input by third parties goes through a variety of different paths. For example, the information entered by third party 25 individuals can be automatically added to the living virtual obituary web page/site 25, as submitted. Alternatively, their information may be forwarded to the controller (or delegated party) who will approve and/or edit the information before posting information on the virtual obituary web site/page 25. In another form the controller modifies the information for placement on the web site 25 or sends it 30 back to the submitter for approval for posting on the web site 25. Alternatively, the controller of the web site can just simply reject the information with or without replying to the submitter. Illustrations of these paths are described later in Fig. 4.

Once information has been added to the living obituary web site/page 25, subsequent viewers have access to all of the information including that which has been most recently posted. This process is repeated as many times as people choose to add new information or comments to the living obituary web site. No time limit need be set for adding information, which may go on for years into the future. This also provides a valuable resource for people doing family tree searches for viewing and getting a greater understanding of the individual that has passed away and also information about relatives of that individual.

In the particular embodiment illustrated, the web page/site 25 has been limited to the viewing and submitting of information. In another embodiment of the present invention the service enables individuals to order hard copy goods and/or services. Referring to Fig. 1, individuals can request copies of information and/or images that had been submitted to the web site 25. This information may include, for example, images, text, and/or sound that have been submitted by friends and relatives that were unfamiliar or unknown to the viewer. In such cases the web page/site 25 provides information that is immediately links the viewer to a service provider 50, such as Print @ Kodak, over the Internet. The service provider 50 can then fulfill the request for goods and/or services and deliver the goods and/or services to the viewer. It is of course understood that appropriate mechanisms for payment of these services, the information of the types of goods and/or services requested and where they are to be delivered are provided as described in Patent Application 09/378,159, August 19, 1999 which is hereby included by reference. The individual can also print locally using their personal home computer or print locally at the Kiosk 60. The benefit of the current system is that once the individual sees something that is desirable, an immediate link is made to provider 50 for the ordering of the goods and/or services. A referral fee may be collected by the web page/site 25 for any business forwarded to the provider 50 from the web page/site 25.

Individuals that do not have a computer at their home can have access to web page/site 25 through the use of a Kiosk 60. Referring to Fig. 4 there is illustrated is a schematic diagram of a Kiosk 60 that can be used for accessing the virtual reality obituary web page/site 25. The Kiosk 60 is provided

with appropriate input controls allowing access to the Internet 12 and to the web 25. The Kiosk 60 also includes a display screen 62, a data entry mechanism, such as a keyboard 64 for data entry by the user, and a card slot 66 having an associated reader for reading of the information on the access card 22. This Kiosk 60 can be 5 located at a remote site placed at a business establishment such as the funeral home 14. However, it is to be understood that the Kiosk 60 can be of any commercial type and placed in any appropriate location. The Kiosk 60 having an appropriate payment mechanism 68 is capable of receiving payments for any goods and/or services. In the particular embodiment illustrated, the Kiosk 60, as 10 shown in Fig. 3, has the capability of providing copies of text and/or images to the user. In another option, the Kiosk 60 is equipped with the appropriate devices for producing CDs, tapes, and other recordings on which images, text, sound and other data are contained. In such cases an output delivery device 70 is provided for the delivering of the requested product to the user of the Kiosk 60. Of course 15 other input or output devices 72, 74 may be provided as desired.

In the particular embodiment described above, the access card 22 can provide automatic access to the web page/site 25. The reader (not shown) reads the barcode from the access card 22 and thereby allows instant access to the web site 25. In this situation, the access card 22 can be used to provide a type of 20 password protection so that only individuals who possess the access card 22 and know the appropriate password are able to automatically and quickly link them to the web page/site 25. The access card 22 also includes codes for multiple access levels so that only the appropriate level of access is provided for the particular cardholder.

25 To better understand the present invention, a brief description of this operation will now be discussed in greater detail.

Referring to Fig. 5, a flow chart describes one method of operation of the present invention. A web page/site 25 is created for the deceased, step 80. The appropriate base line information is provided on the web site, step 82. The 30 location of the web page/site 25 and instructions/access to it are provided to desired individuals such as family members and friends, step 84. The individuals access the web site and view the information contained on it, step 86. At step 88,

an individual accessing the site may check and edit previously entered information or may decide to enter new information. In one embodiment, the database storing the information is then updated, step 90 and individuals subsequently accessing the web page/site 25 will then see the updated information.

5 Referring now to Fig. 6, a flow chart describes another embodiment of a method of operation of the present invention. The controller of the web page/site 25 screens the information submitted, step 94, and decides whether to accept, reject, or modify the newly submitted information. If the information is accepted, the database for the web page/site 25 is modified, step 10

90. If the information is rejected, an email, or other notification, is sent to the submitter notifying them of the rejection, at decision block, step 96. If the controller decides to edit the information, step 102, he or she sends the modified submission back to the submitter, step 104. The submitter can either accept the edited version, decision block, step 106 in which case the database is updated, step 15 90, or reject the edited version, decision block, step 106, in which case the process ends, step 100.

As previously noted, not only can information be submitted by various people, it can also be shared by many viewers so that all can have a common understanding of the life of the deceased individual. Also, as previously 20 discussed, there may be information entered onto the web page/site 25, which is new to many viewers. For example, a person may see an image of a particular event or person which is new to them, and they may wish to own a copy of it. In this system they may request that a copy of the image either from the controller of the web page/site 25 or from a service provider 50. A link may be provided to the 25 service provider 50 whereby the information being displayed may be turned into hard copy images, CDs, or other products that the provider may offer. In addition, information may be provided on the database of where the image or text originated so that the viewing individual may go back to this individual and get perhaps a higher quality image from the original source, which then could be 30 again turned, into a product for the user. In addition to providing these services, there may be provided incentives for people to use the service provider by the providing of coupons and certificates good for being redeemable at a particular

provider based on the fact that the images were originally gathered from this web site.

One of the advantages of the present invention is that information may be added and/or shared by various individuals at any time from remote locations. This allows greater time for reflection, for remembering things about the individual, and for deciding what should be stated about the individual. Also, this invention provides a mechanism whereby information about a variety of different individuals can be grouped, commonly stored, and accessed quickly and easily in a controlled manner. Also, the present invention, by gathering names of individuals at a time when they come together at the funeral, permits information to be easily gathered from a large variety of sources. In addition, the present invention allows this information to be gathered in a relatively unobtrusive manner, i.e. by providing cards that people just simply take with them for later use. Finally, it also provides e-mail addresses so that individuals can contact each other at some appropriate time in the future.

It is to be understood that various modifications and changes may be made without departing from the present invention, the present invention being defined by the following claims.

PARTS LIST

10 system
12 Internet
14 funeral home
16 ISP/server
18 computer/server
20 data entry system
21 hosting obituary service
22 access card
24 URL
25 Web page/site
26 server
27 name of deceased
28 date
29 bar code/magnetic stripe
30 image
32 sponsor
34 front side
35 names of the surviving
36 previously deceased family members
37 template
38 authorized individuals
39 information/data
40 home
41 Internet service providers
42 office
43 Internet service providers
44 computer/server
45 computer/server
46 data entry device
47 data entry device
48 multimedia information

49 general access
50 service provider
51 private access
52 categories
55 prompt
60 Kiosk
62 display screen
64 keyboard
66 card slot
68 payment mechanism
70 output delivery device
80 step
82 step
84 step
86 step
88 step
90 step
94 step
96 step
98 step
100 step
102 step
104 step
106 step